

Sonship

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: . . . Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

—I John 3:1,2

that serveth him.” (Mal. 3:16,17) “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:26) “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, . . . in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” (Phil. 2:15) “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. . . . The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that

AN APPRECIATION OF THE

privilege of sonship is an essential aid to our faithfulness. In addition to our opening text, we note these statements from the Scriptures. “They that feared [reverenced] the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them. . . . They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son

we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:14,16,17) “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.”—Rom. 8:19, *New American Standard Bible*

It is a great privilege to be a child of God, because, according to his Word, we all once were “children of disobedience, . . . by nature the children of wrath.” (Eph. 2:2,3) If it were not for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, we would still be under the condemnation of death. We, along with the entire fallen race of mankind, could not be counted as part of God’s family as long as we were the “children” of sin and death inherited from our first parents.

ADAM LOST SONSHIP

Adam was created a son of God—an earthly, human son, in the “image” and “likeness” of God, although a “little lower than the angels.” (Gen. 1:26,27; Ps. 8:4,5) Adam lost his sonship through disobedience. With it he also lost communion with God. His progeny did not have the blessing of being sons of God, nor did they have the fellowship of communion with him. However, quoting in more detail the words of the Apostle Paul, we read, “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh,

fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”—Eph. 2:1-3

The apostle here tells us that we were born children of Adam’s disobedience, and of the wrath associated with God’s condemnation of him in Eden. In this condition, we were “dead in trespasses and sins”—that is, dead in Adam’s trespass. However, we find a ray of hope in the words: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth [Greek: remains] on him.” (John 3:36) Indeed, there was no hope of sonship for any of mankind until Jesus, God’s “only begotten Son,” came into the world. (vs. 16) Then, however, that hope began to be rekindled.

Abraham was a great man, and devoted to righteousness, but he was not a son of God. The record is that he was “the Friend of God.” (James 2:23) Moses, likewise, was a noble individual, and a faithful servant, but he was not a son of God. Paul said, “Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, . . . But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we.” (Heb. 3:5,6) Here we are introduced to the possibility of sonship, but how do we become members of this household of sons? How do we change from being children of disobedience, under divine condemnation, to become children of God?

HOW WE BECOME SONS

If we are to appreciate this relationship, we must know how it is made possible. The “ransom for all” provided by “the man Christ Jesus” is the basis of

it all. (I Tim. 2:5,6) Jesus further elaborated, saying, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” (John 5:24) The apostle expresses the same thought with the following words: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”—Rom. 8:1,2

The way in which we become sons of God is by coming to him in full belief and faith “in Christ Jesus,” his only begotten Son, and by making an unreserved consecration to do his will. It is through the imputation of the merit of the ransom, if we thus consecrate, that we are covered by Christ’s “robe of righteousness,” and presented to the Father. Clothed with this “robe,” we are “accepted in the beloved,” for the Father sees us as righteous—justified in his sight. (Isa. 61:10; Eph. 1:6; I Cor. 6:11) Thus we are released from Adamic condemnation, and “begotten” to a new “lively,” or living, hope. (I Pet. 1:3) No longer children of Adam’s disobedience, we are now described as “obedient children,” and are considered sons of God. (vs. 14) To omit any part of this process is to stop short of sonship.

The Jewish followers of the Master were the first of the human race since perfect Adam to become sons of God. This took place on the Day of Pentecost. In John’s Gospel account, he states that Jesus came to his Jewish brethren, but most “received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them

that believe on his name.” (John 1:11,12) Later, beginning with Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, this privilege of sonship was extended to all, without restriction as to nationality or otherwise. (Acts 10:1-45) Hence, it is God’s will that people of all nations, kindreds, and tongues constitute those who make up his house of sons.

“ABBA, FATHER”

Paul wrote, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Rom. 8:14,15) The phrase, “Abba, Father,” is a beautiful expression. Another usage of it is found in these words: “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son.” (Gal. 4:6,7) Here we note that this cry proceeds from our hearts through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In these verses, “Abba” is the Chaldean word for Father, left untranslated, and the Greek word *pater* is translated “Father.” Thus, each is a reference to God as “Father.” Jesus used both words. “Abba” was the word he was brought up with. His natural language as a boy was Chaldean Aramaic. He, doubtless, loved to utter his Heavenly Father’s name in the way he was originally taught. Think of the simplicity and warmth of our Lord’s words in his prayer recorded in Mark 14:36: “Abba, Father all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

ADOPTION—A LEGAL PROCESS

In one of the verses just considered—Romans 8:15—another word is introduced. It is the word “adoption,” which appears several times in the New Testament. In today’s usage, to “adopt” means to take a person—usually a child—into one’s own family by a legal process which, when complete, results in the “adopted” one being treated as though he or she was a natural child of the family, with all the rights and privileges attached thereto. The same is true of our sonship. The Greek word from which “adoption” is translated, according to *Strong’s Concordance*, means “placing as a son.” The use of this word emphasizes the legal process through which we are made acceptable to God and thus become sons, begotten of him through his Spirit.

In harmony with this thought, certain legalities had to be accomplished in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus before we could become God’s sons. Paul had recounted these things in the early chapters of Romans. The ransom price had to be provided, and its payment to God’s justice was also necessary, “that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:26) These requirements having been met, the way to sonship was lawfully made available. If, then we have followed the steps previously discussed—faith in the blood of Jesus and unreserved consecration—we are “placed as sons” by the legal means of redemption and the begetting of the Holy Spirit provided by God.

A DIFFERENT WORD

In numerous passages of the New Testament, Peter, John, and Paul use a word for “sons” which

conveys the thought of one who shares a special closeness with the Father. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* comments on this word, saying that it denotes "all who are led by the Spirit of God and thus closely related to God." It is this word that is used in I Peter 1:14: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." John uses it in John 1:11,12, quoted earlier in our lesson, and again in our opening text, where he speaks of the love of the Father, by which we are "called the sons of God," and promised that "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—I John 3:1,2

Paul also uses the same word in describing our position as sons. He says, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." (Phil. 2:15) Here the apostle reminds us that he has not forgotten the requirements that must be satisfied in order that we should be considered "blameless," "harmless," and "without rebuke" before God. However, when those legal demands have been satisfied, as they were by Christ Jesus, then the relationship of true sonship with God became our privilege.

Let us, therefore, not be confused. Our "adoption" speaks only of the process by which we have been legally "placed as sons." Man legally lost full sonship, which Adam had as a perfect human being. Christ had to die in order that mankind could lawfully be released from condemnation. By his death and resurrection, the means whereby we could be "placed as sons" was accomplished. As a result, it has become possible for us to be real sons of God—Christ having legally opened the way.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

Later in the New Testament, we read, “It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb. 2:10) The great truth that “many sons” would be brought to glory was unfolded by the forceful teachings of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. His message is summarized well in words he wrote concerning “the mystery of Christ . . . Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”—Eph. 3:4-6

As children of God, whether we be Jew or Gentile, we must learn many things. We must learn to be led by his Spirit. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) Up until the time we consecrated, through the drawings of God, the Holy Spirit was the power that led us toward the most important decision of our lives. Now, however, having made that decision, and having become sons of God, the Holy Spirit is our daily guide, and we must follow its leadings. Our all-wise Heavenly Father, through the Holy Spirit, directs our providences, and we must accept them. The Holy Spirit overrules the experiences of our life, and we must learn the lessons. It also reveals God’s will for us, and we must do it to the best of our ability. We must forget our own will, and follow the leadings of divine grace as they are manifest to us by God’s Spirit. We

(Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) are guided “into all truth” by the Holy Spirit. (John 16:13) Therefore, we must be willing to accept and follow truth as it is revealed to us.

We also must learn obedience as a child of God. That is a difficult lesson, especially to the extent that we are, by nature, self-willed and self-centered. It was not a difficult lesson for Jesus, but he still had to learn obedience. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Heb. 5:8,9) Indeed, Christ’s example of obedience is the standard which we must follow as sons of God. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—II Cor. 10:4,5

THE CHRISTIAN’S FIGHT

We do not fight with carnal weapons of the fleshly mind, with its ambitions and its prejudices and personal aspirations, but with the Word of God, and with his Spirit. Thus the strongholds of error, tradition, speculation, and self-will, go down. The imaginations of human reasoning and philosophies fall. Every high thing, every haughty attitude, every manifestation of pride, every exaltation of self, and everything that keeps us from the fullness of his blessing, must be conquered by the power of God’s truth as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Victory in war brings prisoners to the victor’s army. Our victory

over pride and self-will also brings prisoners. It brings into captivity every thought of our hearts and minds to the “obedience of Christ.”

The important matter of obedience can perhaps be summed up in these words: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are; . . . whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” (Rom. 6:16,17) Let us be obedient, “from the heart,” even unto death.

DISCIPLINE NECESSARY

As sons of God, we must endure discipline. We read: “You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him; For those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the

peaceful fruit of righteousness.”—Heb. 12:5-11, *NASB*

The word “discipline” as used in this passage comes from a Greek word meaning “education or training.” Hence, we understand that discipline need not mean disapproval on the part of our Father, nor does it necessarily mean sin on the part of the son. Our Father knows we need instruction. The experiences of life which come to us as discipline actually show our Father’s love in that he provides them as part of our schooling, as educational instruction for our spiritual profit. It is true that some disciplines do come as a result of our own mistakes—whether in word or action. The natural consequences that flow from these mistakes are not at first joyous, but grievous. We all have these experiences at times, along with the mental sorrow that comes as a result.

Many of the heartaches we endure have been caused by our own mistakes. Our Father could save us from them, but he does not do so, because he knows we can learn lessons from these experiences. They teach us our weaknesses, and our dependence on him. They are what the Bible terms “correction,” and “instruction in righteousness.” (II Tim. 3:16) Through these experiences, the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are truly sons of God. May we always understand this relationship, and be willing to accept his instructions.

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

As sons of God we must also realize that we are children of light, and this carries with it responsibility. “Ye are all the children of light, and the children

of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth).” “Ye are the light of the world.” (I Thess. 5:5; Eph. 5:8,9; Matt. 5:14) These verses remind us that not only are we to be children of light, but we also are to walk in the light, have the fruitage of that light, and be a light in the world. Let us examine ourselves to see whether we are “children” of God in these ways.

One of the marks of a true Christian is that he will continually seek to abide in the light of truth by searching the Scriptures. Only thus will he quench his thirst for truth, and obtain the understanding of the fruitage necessary to properly reflect the light of truth to others. As all the “children of light” make such efforts, a mutual brotherhood, based on love, is developed. In the natural family arrangement, “sibling rivalry” is often manifested by one member toward another. Such is not to be the case, however, among the spiritual children of God. Rather, mutual love, care, fellowship, assistance, and support, should always be the guiding principles of our relationship one with another.

The day will soon come when all the faithful spiritual sons of God will have finished their earthly sojourn. They will be glorified as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:17) This will be another wonderful privilege of sonship. With such a prospect before us, we can join with Paul, when he said, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—vs. 18

MANKIND WAITING

Today, the vast majority of mankind “groans and suffers” under divine condemnation. The human race “waits eagerly” for a better day, though not knowing how or when it will come about. We understand, however, that all who will ever be recognized by God as his sons, whether in heaven or on earth, must first be freed from the bondage of sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ. We know also that ultimately the only ones who will be privileged to have life will be those who become sons of God, either on the human or spiritual plane of existence. The whole creation is indeed waiting “for the revealing of the sons of God”—waiting for the Christ, God’s spiritual family, to come into power and great glory. The “revealing” of these sons of God will result in the blessing of the remainder of mankind with the benefits of salvation, and “set free from its slavery to corruption.”—Rom. 8:19-22, *NASB*

Let us be faithful, so that we can share in the manifestation of the sons of God, and have a part in dispensing blessings to all the families of the earth. Reiterating again the words of our opening Scripture, “Now are we the sons of God.” The world does not know us as God’s children, just as the Jewish nation did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. However, we are promised: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:1,2 ■